

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

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CONTACT: DAVID MOULTON
(202) 225-2836

MARKEY RELEASES MEDICAL REPORT INCLUDING 15 REPORTS OF NEUROLOGICAL DAMAGE AND BRAIN INJURY FROM AMUSEMENT PARK RIDES Lawmaker urges industry to set g-force limits

Washington, DC: Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA) today made public the findings of a report documenting numerous cases of brain injury suffered by riders during the normal operation of roller coasters and similar amusement park rides. The report, prepared at Markey's request by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), includes 23 citations and 15 case studies since 1979. They involve riders of all ages who have stepped off roller coasters or other amusement park rides with subdural hematoma, internal cranial bleeding and other symptoms of traumatic brain injury. Fourteen of the 15 cases are clustered in the 1990s, and 13 occurred in just the five-year span from 1994 to 1999. In some cases surgery was necessary to remove the hematoma or to prevent life-threatening complications.

"The NINDS report is the first comprehensive effort to assemble what is known about the impact of the sometimes-violent forces experienced during amusement park rides by the riding public," said Markey. "It is startling to see the cluster of reports that have sprung up between 1994 and 1999, coinciding with a period of rapid growth in roller coaster construction and the increasing use of steel technology to build higher, faster, multiple-inversion coasters. It appears that technology and commercial pressures are combining in a way that could threaten serious health consequences if the problem remains unaddressed."

Markey forwarded the report to the American Society for Testing and Material (ASTM), an industry consensus standards-setting body, for immediate consideration by its Committee on Amusement Rides and Devices. While the amusement park industry in Germany is in the final stages of adopting limits on g-forces (multiples of the pull of gravity) applied by coasters to the bodies of riders as they are hurtled through loops and compressions, the United States amusement park industry has set no limits.

In his letter to the president of the industry standards-setting body, Markey wrote "It is my hope that this new information will be sufficiently compelling to result in prompt action...[T]he U.S. amusement ride industry needs to be able to explain why a ride considered unsafe in Germany would be considered safe in this country."

In a related development, the House Committee on Commerce just set a date to consider H.R. 3032, the Amusement Ride Safety Act authored by Rep. Markey. The bill will be considered in a hearing before the Subcommittee on Telecommunications, Trade and Consumer Protection, on which Markey sits, on Tuesday, May 16. The bill would restore oversight of rides in permanent theme parks by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Rides in such parks were exempted from any federal oversight in 1981.

Additional information about these issues can be found online at www.house.gov/markey/issues.htm.